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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000477

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SUBJECT: OMANI ATTORNEY GENERAL REVIEWS OMAN'S ACTIONS ON TIP; EAGER
TO DO MORE

REF: A. MUSCAT 201; B. MUSCAT 403

CLASSIFIED BY: Gary A. Grappo, Ambassador, Department of State,
Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶11. (C) Summary: The Omani Attorney General (AG) told the Ambassador that he expects a judgment will be issued in the current Trafficking in Persons (TIP) case (ref A) soon and gave Embassy further details of the case and the temporary accommodations for the initial alleged victims. He outlined plans to nominate a team of prosecutors to work on TIP crimes with the intention of providing additional training for them. He noted that the National Anti-TIP Plan should be completed soon, and he hoped it would provide the USG with further information about Oman's plans for combating trafficking. The Assistant AG is slated to attend a TIP-related International Visitors Program (IVP) in July and expressed interest in consultations with officials in the Department during his visit. See action request in paragraph 11. End Summary.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador and poloff met May 19 with Attorney General Hussain Ali Zaher al-Helali and Assistant Attorney General and Director of Regional and International Cooperation Nasser Abdulla al-Riyami to discuss Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issues and progress. The Omanis welcomed U.S. input and suggestions for combating TIP and were enthusiastic about their recent achievements.

Current Case

¶13. (C) Al-Helalil said that a judgment in the first TIP case should be rendered and publicly announced soon. He emphasized that according to the law, in the event of a conviction, the judge would have no leeway to suspend the sentence and that all TIP crimes are felonies in Oman. He explained that the first case involved organized crime that had been on-going for three or more years, involving accused from Oman, Syria, Morocco, Egypt, and Lebanon. While the law allows any person with legal residency in Oman to bring his/her spouse into the country, the accused group brought women here using forged marriage documents from Syria. The accused intended to take the 13 women, from Algeria, Morocco and Syria, to Bahrain (via the GCC free travel agreement) for use in prostitution there.

National Plan

¶14. (C) Al-Helali referred to the National Anti-TIP Plan throughout the meeting, and indicated that it would be released soon. He thought that roles and responsibilities, especially of other

ministries and the police, would be much clearer once the plan was completed. He welcomed our ideas, and at one point invited specific suggestions for inclusion in the national plan.

Shelters - Temporary and Permanent

¶5. (C) The AG noted that the involvement of 13 women from other countries in the current case necessitated the establishment of a temporary shelter. He had personally visited the shelter and showed us photos. Located in Sidab, the shelter has 3 rooms, with space for 4-6 women in each room. There are bunk beds, storage areas, fresh fruit and a plasma TV visible in the pictures. The women are free to come and go and receive visitors, but they are required to have an escort when they leave the shelter. Al-Helali emphasized that it is "a shelter, not a prison." He confirmed that construction of a permanent shelter was in progress (ref B).

TIP Focused Group in Public Prosecution

¶6. (C) Al-Helali told us that he had selected a team of prosecutors within his department to handle all TIP prosecutions. This would enable them to be specially trained and maintain

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expertise on TIP crimes. He created the Department of Regional and International Cooperation, headed by the Assistant Attorney General, responsible for publishing an annual report for TIP crimes, which will include data on arrests, convictions, punishments and nationalities of the persons involved. He noted that the 2009 report will be the country's first report under the new law.

Training

¶7. (C) Al-Helali reiterated several times that training was "vital" for prosecutors, judges, and police, emphasizing the importance of training all elements of the criminal justice system together, so they would have a common understanding. Therefore, he would invite judges and police to any scheduled training conducted for his department. His current focus is to train the public prosecutors on TIP, with initial plans for one week of training next month. This training will include an evaluation of the current TIP case and will use internal resources. However, he welcomed assistance from U.S. Embassy for this training. When asked about the training the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) recently received from the ILO, he confirmed that the last ILO training had been under his patronage and he attended; he was very open to ILO training of prosecutors in the future.

Hotline

¶8. (C) Although post has received mixed messages about the existence of a TIP-specific hotline, Nasser confirmed that while the Public Prosecution has its own hotline (distinct from the MoM), it is for any crime and is not dedicated to TIP. The AG thought a TIP-specific hotline, with the number published at all ports of entry, was a good idea and instructed Nasser to include that suggestion for the national plan.

Labor

¶9. (C) When asked if Oman would prosecute a TIP case involving labor abuse (vs. prostitution), al-Helali said he would need someone to report an issue in this area. To date, no one had brought a specific case to the prosecution's attention. He confirmed that if, for example, a recruitment agency brought workers to Oman under false pretenses, and created a forced labor situation, it would be prosecuted under the new TIP law.

International Visitor's Program Participation

¶10. (C) Nasser will go to the U.S. on the TIP International Visitors Program in July. He said that he welcomes consultations with the Department during this time.

¶11. (C) Comment and Action Request: The AG and his assistant appeared excited to discuss the progress that has been made in the past year, and were particularly eager to share photos of the temporary shelter with us. Equally, they were enthusiastic about the future and further plans to continue to confront this issue in Oman. Post has been in contact with the Department to arrange consultations for the assistant AG when he travels to the U.S. Post would welcome any alternatives for further assisting the Omanis with their TIP training needs. Finally, post welcomes Department's suggestions for inclusion in Oman's national anti-TIP plan. The AG was serious about receiving such ideas and post would like to respond no later than June 15. End Comment.

GRAPPO